



Child Welfare Services

Montgomery County Maryland

Annual Report 2006

Safe children, Stable families, Strong communities



CHILD WELFARE SERVICES 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

OUR VISION: A future where children are safe, families are stable and communities are strong.

MISSION STATEMENT: To protect children, preserve families, strengthen communities, and ensure permanency for every abused and neglected child in Montgomery County.

GOALS:

- Provide child-centered, family-focused, and community-oriented services that adhere to national standards of best practice and result in positive outcomes for children and families
- Advocate for the provision of essential services to children and families.
- Create a work environment that attracts and retains competent and diverse staff and promotes professional development and leadership.

CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We are dedicated to protecting children, preserving families and strengthening communities in Montgomery County. Our staff is energetic, creative, and committed to providing a wide variety of services to vulnerable children. We recognize that children do best when living in safe, stable and nurturing families. We strive to ensure that children have permanent placements as quickly as possible. In most cases, children should be returned to live with their parents or extended family members. When that is impossible, we rely on our very talented foster and adoptive parents who welcome the children into their homes and provide nurturing loving support to our children.

We are very proud of our recent accomplishments as we seek opportunities to maintain high standards for services by introducing new best practices and strengthening existing ones. The expansion of the Child Assessment Center, the formation of a new Kinship Unit, and the introduction of a family team decision making model are just a few of the new initiatives during the past year.

In the coming year, we look forward to helping children and youth overcome the pain of abuse and neglect, and assisting parents in improving the care they provide to their children. We will continue to invite feedback from individuals and our community partners, so we may continue to improve our services to Montgomery County's most vulnerable youth. We will continue to form new partnerships and seek additional resources to support the children and families who are served by Child Welfare.

Agnes Farkas Leshner, Child Welfare Services Director



THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Child Welfare Services is a complex system that offers a wide range of services to assess and ensure child safety and well being. Social workers conduct clinical assessments to determine the most appropriate intervention for children and families. In some situations, there is no need for services, and the case is closed. In other situations, services are provided by a community agency. If problems are considered serious, but the child can remain in the home, social workers provide in-home services and regularly visit the family. If children cannot safely remain in their home they are temporarily placed with relatives or in a foster home. If reunification with parents is not possible, then placement with a relative or an adoptive family is an alternative. Having a safe permanent living arrangement is the goal for all children.



Assessing the Needs of Vulnerable Children:

The Screening Unit is the single point of entry for all Child Welfare cases. Social Workers in this unit receive the referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect, and determine the need for more complete assessment, investigation or other services. A total of 10,350 telephone calls were received during this past fiscal year, which is an 8% increase over FY 2005.

Five Assessment Units investigate reports of alleged physical and sexual child abuse and neglect, and evaluate the need for services to ensure child safety and promote family preservation. Last year, social workers investigated 2819 families involving 5884 children (this was a 5% increase over the previous year). Neglect investigations accounted for 45% of the total investigations, while 33% were physical abuse, 10% were sexual abuse, and 12% were referrals from other agencies.

Services to Families

When children remain in their homes, specialized Family Preservation Services are offered to families. These services are time-limited, intensive, and home-based. Last year, 97 families received these specialized services, involving 248 children. The program was highly successful, with 99% of the children remaining safely in their homes and did not require removal.

In addition, less intensive in-home services were provided to an average of 196 children each month. These services are offered to families where abuse or neglect has occurred, yet imminent danger is no longer present. Social workers monitor the continued safety of these children by visiting the family regularly, arranging counseling and providing a variety of support services to parents.

Kinship Care

The Kinship Care Team was established in Montgomery County in October 2005 to provide services to families in which a child was removed from the parents, through Juvenile Court, and placed with a relative. Kinship care is considered the best placement option if a child is not safe to remain in his/her own home, and if the kinship placement can meet the needs of the child by providing a healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing environment. The kinship caregiver and the kinship home are assessed for safety and suitability. Supportive services are provided to the child, parents and kinship caregivers. Kinship Care Services maintain the family system as the primary source of care for children and preserve the continuity of care, culture, and relationships essential for child well-being. Of the more than 85 children in kinship care from October 2005 through June 2006, 97% were placed as a result of neglect by their parents, with 76% of the parents being drug involved. The Kinship Care Team collaborated with the Income Support Office and the Child Care Subsidy Program to provide resources to relatives. The Team also worked closely with Addiction Services to coordinate drug treatment services.

Foster Care

Out-of-Home Placement, called foster care, is intended to be a temporary placement for abused and neglected children who cannot remain safely with their families. Social workers provide case management and planning for permanent placement for children who are in out-of-home placements. A variety of reunification services offered to families can reduce the length of time children remain out of the home. If reunification is not possible, the focus becomes exploring other permanent living arrangements for children.

Last year an average of 530 children per month received services while they were in out-of-home placements. There were 186 new entries into out-of-home care (this was a 19% reduction from last fiscal year). An average of 280 children lived in foster homes, 88 children resided with relatives, and 160 children were in group or residential care.

Independent Living

Older youth who cannot return to live with their families receive Independent Living services to help prepare them for a transition from foster care to independent living. These services include case management, classes focusing on money management, career planning, maintaining a family and social network, taking responsibility for health care, and referral to educational and job resources. In addition, financial assistance is provided for college tuition and fees, living expenses and skill development opportunities leading to self sufficiency. Last year, 210 youth between the ages of 14 and 21 received Independent Living services. Many of the youth completed high school or attended college, vocational or technical training.

Adoption

Compared to previous years, the number of finalized adoptions decreased this year. This was due to a variety of factors, including the creation of the Kinship Care Unit that works to promote care by relatives. The court process has also played a role in fewer finalizations. There continues to be a lengthy appeals process for most termination of parental rights decisions which delay permanence for children. CWS has also observed that many family members prefer to have the Court award them the status of guardians, rather than go through the formal adoption process for their related youngsters.

In addition, many children who are available for adoption are older and may have significant mental health issues which necessitate residential care before they can be placed in a family setting. The severity of the children's psychological and emotional needs makes it more challenging to locate adoptive resources.

Foster and Adoptive Families

Last year we maintained an average of 280 approved foster and adoptive homes each month. Information and foster family recruitment meetings were held three times per month and attended by a total of 415 prospective foster parents. There were 158 studies completed and 57 new families were licensed. Monthly trainings were provided to existing foster parents to respond to the complex needs of children and youth. An innovative unit recruitment team was developed to broaden the scope of efforts to secure foster and adoptive homes. This new team doubled the number of contacts to community members. The new marketing logo is "Touch a Child's Heart" and is emblazoned upon recruitment materials.



Health Care

Those children who moved to foster care last year were given prompt physical health screenings. This effort was partially due to aggressive outreach efforts dedicated to ensuring that children receive appropriate timely health care. In addition, more children obtained dental services through the Montgomery County Health and Human Services Dental Program, private community dental providers, the Primary Care Coalition, and other community members who have been attempting to identify and create new dental resources.

Budget and Administration

The FY'06 budget for Child Welfare Services was \$16,877,630. The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) represented approximately 75%, and County funds contributed approximately 25% of the total budget. In addition to funds designated for personnel and basic operating expenses, DHR provided flexible and/or special purpose funds for a variety of services, such as psychological evaluations, preparing youth for independent living, child care for foster parents and relative caretakers, court-ordered therapy, and continuing education/training for staff.

Many client services, particularly mental-health services, were made possible by funding from outside Child Welfare. The Core Service Agency made resources available for in-home crisis intervention/stabilization services and for attachment and bonding studies for young children. In addition, a grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts helped provide specialized services for children moving to adoption. In addition, the Collaboration Council increased services by coordinating family preservation and wrap around services for children in the Child Welfare system.

Legal Activities

The Division of Health and Human Services of the Office of the County Attorney continued to provide legal representation for CWS. This unit consists of attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries. Montgomery County remains the only county in the state to co-locate the legal team with CWS staff. This team represents CWS in Juvenile Court, in other court proceedings and at administrative appeals. In addition, the attorneys review cases with child welfare staff, prepare social workers to testify and provide regular legal training programs for staff. A court liaison is stationed in the court to facilitate the relationship between the court and the social workers. The close effective working relationship between attorneys and social workers was recognized by a NACO award.

FY06 saw a 27% decrease in the number of new Children in Need of Assistance (CINA) cases coming into the Juvenile Court, but only a 10% decrease in the number of court hearings. In addition, 108 cases, mostly CINA cases were mediated in the Juvenile Court, of which 65 resulted in agreements amongst parties. The use of a modified form of Family Team Decision Making by assessment staff may account for some of the decrease in the number of cases coming to Court. Social workers engage parents, extended family and community members in "team" meetings to successfully plan for the safety and well-being of children without the use of out-of-home placements or the Juvenile Court. We anticipate that as we expand the implementation of the formal Team Decision Making protocol, we will experience a further reduction in out-of-home placements and court involvement. Although new cases coming to the attention of the Juvenile Court decreased, there were 39 cases filed for Termination of Parental Rights and Adoption.

In FY'06, there was a major change at Juvenile Court. Beginning in January 2006, an additional judge was assigned to the Juvenile Court bench, providing a total of four judges to hear juvenile matters on a daily basis. There was turnover in judges and four new judges were appointed to the Juvenile Court.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST YEAR

Accreditation

Child Welfare Services achieved national accreditation in 2004. Activities are now focused on maintaining accreditation. Many committees established during the accreditation process continued to function energetically throughout the year. Under the guidance of the Continuous Quality Improvement Council (CQI), seven committees focused on different aspects of the Child Welfare operation. The committees: Personnel, Training, Cultural Competence, Health, Safety, Stakeholder Forum, and Peer Record Review, are integral to the accomplishment of numerous CQI objectives. Each committee submitted reports and recommendations for continual organizational improvement. There has been a sustained focus on Consumer/Client feedback obtained through the Annual Consumer/Client Survey, and Feedback from Community Stakeholder Forums, as well as regular review of records of children under the care of the agency.

Child Assessment Center (CAC)

The Child Assessment Center, referred to as the Tree House, is a public/private partnership between the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Child Welfare Services, Department of Police, and State's Attorneys Office and the Primary Care Coalition. The CAC mission is to coordinate a comprehensive and multidisciplinary response to children who may have suffered physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect and provide a safe, neutral, culturally-sensitive, child-focused setting. The Center provides the highest standard of care for victims of child maltreatment.

During the past year more than 500 children were seen at the Center and more than 800 services were provided. Eight new staff were hired at the Center, thus, enhancing capabilities to provide mental health therapy to child victims, siblings and non-offending parents; and victim advocacy for children and their families. The physician increased the number of cases he evaluated by 50%. Peer and quality review of both the medical and mental health teams has been established. Highly active private partner involvement resulted in increased advocacy and focus on the need for additional staffing. The program received the HHS Outstanding Private-Public Partnership of the year.

The Responsible Fathers Program

This program for young fathers, funded by a DHR grant, provided resources and services to young fathers to help them develop meaningful relationships with their children, obtain employment, and contribute to the support of their families. Partnerships with educational and job training programs, Child Support Enforcement, mental health and physical health providers, therapeutic/educational parenting programs, among others, were instrumental in engaging fathers, establishing paternity, and involving fathers in their children's lives. One hundred and eight young fathers were served by the program with the majority of the participants securing and maintaining employment, contributing financially to the support of their children and strengthening the parental bond. Thirty-one children in foster care were reunited with their fathers and their paternal families.



Family Team Decision Making

Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) is a new practice strategy that was introduced to connect families to neighborhood and community supports. FTDM meetings are held prior to changes in child placement. Participants work toward developing a plan to ensure the safety of the child or children. It is a collaborative effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children by including family members, agency staff, service providers, community members, foster parents, the family's support network and, if age appropriate, the child. Using FTDM will result in children being able to remain in their communities and/or will reduce the number of children placed in out of home care, decrease the length of stay in placement, decrease the number of replacements and re-entries into placement.

Foster Parent Appreciation

CWS celebrated and honored approximately 90 foster parents at a dinner at Brookside Gardens. The venue was provided at no cost and was catered by Outback Steakhouse. Community businesses donated prizes for families that included gifts such as dinners, spa treatments, movie passes and weekend stay at local hotels. The event was a special "Thank You" to Foster Families for opening their hearts and homes and taking care of the community's most vulnerable children.

Post Adoption Services

A new County program, was introduced to serve children who were adopted and who are now experiencing difficulties. This program, in partnership with the Center for Adoption Services and Education (CASE), offered post adoption services through individual and group counseling. The aim of the program is to resolve problems with children and families and to prevent the dissolution of the adoption. During a five month period, 20 families participated in counseling and children in those families participated in group counseling with other adopted children. Children and families reported positive outcomes from these sessions.

Early Childhood

Partnerships with Infants & Toddlers, Head Start and other programs targeting young families and preschool children have been shown to be successful in facilitating early evaluation and intervention for developmental disabilities. CWS served more than 700 children, from birth to three years, with 30% meeting the criteria for evaluation from an early childhood specialist. This transdisciplinary approach has been significant in targeting children and families for rapid assessment and services often taking place in the home. Both children and parents benefit from the skills gained, socialization and knowledge of community resources available. Collaboration with Head Start assures that eligible children are enrolled in preschool programs to better prepare them for elementary education.

Community Giving:

The **Generous Juror Program**, a joint project between the Circuit Court and Child Welfare Services, gave prospective jurors the opportunity to donate their jury fee to support activities to benefit children served by CWS. It continues to be highly successful and collected more than \$72,000. These funds were used for camp scholarships, tutoring and school supplies for children who otherwise would not have had such experiences or provisions. The program was recognized as a Montgomery's Best Program.

The **Adopt-A-Social-Worker Program** received voluntary donations from the community for children under the care of Child Welfare. Funding and donations were given to children for school supplies, birthday presents, holiday presents, and graduation presents for high school seniors. Items donated included new shoes and clothing, overnight bags and toiletries, and computers. In total, more than \$90,000 in items and financial contributions were received and distributed to children during the past year.

Staffing

Recruitment and retention of staff continued to be a major challenge during the past year. Twenty-seven professional staff left while twenty-nine new staff were hired. Staff left for a variety of professional and personal reasons. Exit interviews helped identify work related challenges that we are striving to overcome. Importantly, many young social workers reported that they left to go to less stressful social work positions.

An Integrated Approach

Child Welfare Services advocates an integrated approach to protecting the well-being of children, youth and the family. Toward that end, CWS maintains a large array of partnerships and collaborations. Some of the key partnerships include:

- Representatives of CWS, the County Attorney's Office, Montgomery County Police Department, State Attorney's Office, the Department of Juvenile Services, and CAC staff meet weekly at the Juvenile Assessment Center in a multidisciplinary team meeting to discuss complex multi-agency cases.
- Easy access to services is made possible by a variety of specialists, from other programs and agencies being co-located with CWS staff.
 - The Income Support program has assigned and co-located a staff member with CWS. This individual provides medical assistance enrollment for children coming into out-of-home care.
 - A mental health professional, funded by the Core Service Agency (CSA) and located at the Child Assessment Center, completes assessments and helps staff identify appropriate mental health resources.
 - The County Attorney has five County Attorneys co-located with Child Welfare staff to address legal concerns and prepare cases for court.

IN PRAISE OF CWS STAFF

Child Welfare Services staff received special recognition for their hard work in a variety of ways:

- **HHS Awards:**

- The Gene Gardner Award, for outstanding citizenship was awarded to **Maurice Miles**, a Community Services Aide who works with children in foster care.
- The Cheryl Friedman Award, for outstanding customer service was awarded to **Carla Matal**, a Community Services Aide with the Child Assessment Center.
- An outstanding humanitarian award was presented to social worker, **Lori Gloster**, who in addition to her work with children and families, volunteered her time to help Katrina victims in the Washington area.
- The Public-Private Partnership Award Recipient was **The Tree House Child Assessment Center of Montgomery County Maryland (CAC)** and the Primary Coalition. The partnership was highlighted for their development of a multidisciplinary team to serve vulnerable children.

- **Montgomery's Best Honor Award** was given to two Child Welfare programs:

- **Generous Juror Program**, organized by a group of dedicated Child Welfare workers, makes presentations to jurors at the Circuit Court to encourage donation of funds for children and youth involved with CWS.
- **Responsible Fathers Program**, **Nate Parks** and **Ed Powell**, were recognized for their work with young fathers to encourage them to be more active in the lives of their children.
- Honorable Mentions were given to Felicite Adusei and Myrtle Barrie-Jemmot, social workers in the Independent Living Program, which helps prepare teens in foster care to live independently.

- The **National Association of Counties (NACO) Award** was presented to CWS and the County Attorney for the effective working relationship between social workers and County attorneys.

Child Welfare Outcome Measures – submitted to HHS Family of Measures-

Percentage of families who received in-home services and subsequently do not have another child protective service investigation with an abuse or neglect finding within one year = 98%

Percentage of families receiving in-home services that do not have another child protective service investigation with an abuse or neglect finding while receiving services = 94.8%

Percentage of children in foster/kinship care who are not victims of abuse or neglect perpetrated by the foster parent or kinship care-giver: 99.5%

Percentage of children who have been placed in out-of-home care who are reunited with their family, whose caretaker is awarded custody or guardianship, or who are placed for adoption: 89.7%

Percentage of children in foster/kinship care who are adopted or placed for adoption within 24 months of entry: 100%

Percentage of independent living youth who maintain a plan of self-sufficiency by remaining in high school, college, vocational training, or full-time employment is 94.4%



Partnerships and Collaborations

These are some of the community groups with which Child Welfare Services collaborates:

Addiction Services Coordination
American Foundation for Latino Americans
Behavioral Health Partners
Board of Social Services
Center for Adoption Support and Education
Child Assessment Center Committee
Child Fatality Review Committee
Child Welfare League
Citizens' Review Boards
Citizens' Review Panel
Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children
Commission on Children and Youth
Community Ministries
Contemporary Therapeutic Services
Council of Governments (COG)
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
Department of Juvenile Justice/ Child Welfare
Services Consultation Team
Domestic Violence Alert Team
Early Childhood Workgroup
Family Service Agency
Friends in Action (FIA)
Governor's State Council on Child Abuse and
Neglect, Legislative Committee
Healthy Families Montgomery
Hearts & Homes
High Risk Consultation Team

Homeless Shelter Providers Team
Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC)
Institute for Family Centered Services
Interagency Child In Need of Supervision (CINS)
Workgroup
Interagency Committee on Adolescent Pregnancy
Juvenile Justice Commission
Linkages to Learning
Local Coordinating Council
Maryland Choices
Maryland Hot Spot Communities
Mental Health Assoc. of Montgomery County
Moms Offering Moms Support (MOMS)
Montgomery County Collaboration Council
Montgomery County Public School Truancy Review
Board
Montgomery County Child Care Resource and
Referral Center
Montgomery County Homeless Families Initiative
Advisory Board
National Center for Children & Families
Operation Runaway
Primary Care Coalition
Progressive Life
Reginald Lourie Center
St Ann's Infant and Maternity Home

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Executive Staff

Agnes F. Leshner

Director

Vicki Baltimore, Office Services Coordinator

Sheila Dennis
Assessment Section Administrator
Sandra Thompson, Office Services Coordinator

Louise Klein
Continuing Section Administrator
Candace Asher, Office Services Coordinator

Angela English
Out of Home Services Administrator
Patty Carson, Office Services Coordinator

Pat Davis Spann
Resource Section Administrator
Phyllis Aikens, Office Services Coordinator OSC

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services has four offices. The main office is in Rockville and there are three regional offices. These offices are co-located with other Montgomery County Government programs.

Headquarters

1301 Piccard Drive, 4th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850
Phone: 240-777-3500
TTY: 240-777-3556

Juvenile Assessment Center

7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 400
Rockville, MD 20855
Phone: 240-777-3409
TTY: 240-777-3560

Germantown Regional Services Center

12900 Middlebrook Road, 2nd Floor
Germantown, MD 20874
Phone: 240-777-3346
TTY: 240-777-8002

Silver Spring Regional Services Center

8630 Fenton Street, 10th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Phone: 240-777-1438
TTY: 240-777-4320

Web Site

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov>